Fukuyama vs Hayek [1]

Written by **Anton Howes** [2] | Tuesday 10 May 2011

The legendary international relations theorist Francis Fukuyama has turned his attention to the evolution of governments, and therefore to Hayek in his new book "The Origins of Political Order". In a piece for the New York Times [3], he defends Hayek's status as a great intellectual, but criticises his ideas.

Firstly, he points out that freedom can be threatened by the powerful. He argues that central government has sometimes defended the liberty of the weak from the coercion of the strong. However, while it may be true that government can defend the liberty of the weak, the concentration of power in an institution able to use force makes that institution more attractive to capture by the strong. After all, the strong have the greater means, so what is to stop them furthering their own aims at the expense of the weak?

Secondly, he argues that Hayek's 'slipperiest of slippery slope arguments' in "The Road to Serfdom" does not automatically occur. He cites historical examples showing that moves toward greater government interference have stalled. But I don't think Hayek would dispute this, as he himself worked to reverse the trend. "The Road to Serfdom" was a warning so that we could recognise statism and attempt to stop it, rather than a description demonstrating the futility of fighting for liberty.

Thirdly, Fukuyama claims that Hayek contradicts his own 'knowledge problem' by being so certain that governments will fail at planning on others' behalf. However, this is not the case. Hayek simply points out that governments are more likely to fail. Firstly, if people have imperfect knowledge about themselves, then other people are likely to have even less knowledge about those they try to govern. Secondly, government does not experiment in the same way as people do, as it uses force to prevent failure, forces people to choose the same things, and uses force to prevent people from opting out. The state may occasionally get things right, but its use of force makes this very unlikely.

Lastly, Fukuyama complains that state and society must be divided according to empirical adaptation rather than the 'strict abstract principle' of freedom. But then, who decides?

Anton Howes is Director of the Liberty League[4].

blog comments powered by Disqus [6]

Source URL: http://www.adamsmith.org/blog/philosophy/fukuyama-vs-hayek

Links:
[1] http://www.adamsmith.org/blog/philosophy/fukuyama-vs-hayek
[2] http://www.adamsmith.org/taxonomy/term/5795
[3] http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/08/books/review/f-a-hayek-big-government-skeptic.html

[4] http://uklibertyleague.com/
[5] http://disqus.com/?ref_noscript
[6] http://disqus.com